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## AIMING FOR “ZERO COVID”

### To achieve “zero covid” we need to include the controlled, careful acquisition of population (herd) immunity

Raj S Bhopal *emeritus professor of public health*

Torjesen asks whether the UK should aim for zero covid.<sup>1</sup> Of course it should, but how? My suggested strategy includes herd immunity, which I rename population immunity given the antipathy to the word herd, evoking animals.<sup>2</sup>

On 7 April 2020 Martin McKee wrote to the covid-19 global researchers email group “seeking sensible thoughts about coming out of lockdown.” I responded with an eight point plan, the last point being that in the absence of a vaccine we should allow young people under 30, particularly women, to get the infection voluntarily, preferably in controlled circumstances. This kind of approach has been conceptualised and modelled by others.<sup>3-5</sup> McKee replied that it was good to think out of the box. But this is already happening in unplanned and haphazard ways.<sup>6</sup> Letting the pandemic unfold uncontrolled is not public health strategy.<sup>2</sup>

I suggest population immunity as part of a comprehensive response.<sup>2</sup> I estimate that about 40-50% population immunity would be sufficient to suppress an infection with a reproduction number of about 1 or slightly more, which requires continuing, reasonable control measures. Others consider this proportion to be much lower.<sup>7</sup> Allowing infection in people at low risk is justifiable if we make it safer for them than allowing it to occur uncontrolled.<sup>2</sup>

Covid-19 is currently rarely fatal in children and young people, less so than influenza for which we already have a vaccine. Showing that a vaccine is safer than covid-19 in young people is, therefore, tough.<sup>8,9</sup>

Public debate, including on population immunity through both natural infection and future vaccination, is urgent.<sup>2</sup> My paper has been covered in national and international media with huge support from public and professionals. My views have been interrogated in detailed interviews by Wired ([https://youtu.be/l1FFKT\\_VZ5c](https://youtu.be/l1FFKT_VZ5c)) and Contagion (<https://youtu.be/VbU6FYrnG8U>).

Population immunity through a mixture of vaccination and natural infection is the only long term solution for zero covid.<sup>2</sup>

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m3071/r>.

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